

Family Care Plans essential for dual-military couples, single parents

By Denver Beaulieu-Hains
Army News Service

About 36,000 single-parent soldiers are in America's Army today. Another 27,000 soldiers are part of a dual-military couple. Those figures don't even include soldiers who deploy and leave their families home alone, making their spouses temporary sole parents.

Every single-parent soldier, dual-military parent and single and dual-military pregnant soldier is required to develop a Family Care Plan by Army Regulation 600-20.

Emergency-essential civilians are also encouraged to have a Family Care Plan.

The plan, DA Form 5305, as a minimum includes proof that a guardian has agreed to care for dependent children under the age of 18. Powers of attorney for medical care, guardianship and the authorization to start or stop financial support should be in the packet. Military identification cards should be issued for children who reside with a single parent or dual military couple. Lastly the regulation requires a letter of instruction to the guardian/escort. This letter should contain specific instructions needed for the guardian to ensure the care of the dependents.

Things the regulation doesn't require but experts say should be considered for the packet include birth certificates, Social Security cards, shot records, other medical or insurance cards, medication dosages for the child if necessary and lists of family-member addresses and phone numbers in case of emergency.

"What it boils down to is that the Family Care Plan is something that may be utilized and not just a paper exercise," said John Meixell, attorney adviser with the Army



Legal Assistance Policy Division. "Soldiers need to make realistic decisions as to who they trust with the care of their children and provide them with all the info they need to exercise reasonable care."

To make an assessment on what is and is not reasonable care, officials said the planning process should be ongoing and not begin at the last minute.

"A deployment or mobilization is a really stressful situation to start with," said Mary Ellen Pratt, who heads the Army's child development programs at the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center. "When families have to worry about one more thing like what happens to your child or your children, that's really going to affect how ready you are to go off on a deployment."

Officials also recommend that parents keep documents such as birth certificates in one place (an accordion-style organizer or file cabinet special drawer). They say parents should label or tab folders to make it easy for the guardian to find documents fast. They say parents should make advance contact with financial institutions, children's doctors, schools and day care providers before deployment. They even recommend giving these agencies a copy of the Family Care Plan.

With numerous National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers mobilized for Operation Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and other contingencies, Sgt. Maj. Charles Steele of the New York National Guard State Family Program said his contingency plan's focus is on more than just providing families with rosters.

"A single parent or dual-military family has to give serious thought to their Family Care Plan," said Steele. "There has to be an agreement between the care giver and the children involved. If either party feels uncomfortable with the situation, it could be a very bad situation."

When parents are considering care givers, adult parties should discuss and be prepared to plan activities for children, said Steele. Children watch the news and they are aware of things that happen, Steele said. He said keeping them involved in other activities may be one way of calming their fears. Also, Steele said the care giver should be willing to attempt to keep the parent and the children connected as much as possible.

"We give out letter-writing kits to deployed parents and calendars to their children," said Steele.

The kit is just one way the family program encourages interaction. The kit is complete with postcards and a map of the world and distinctive envelopes, so when the child sees the envelope, the envelope can be easily recognized.



Capt. Robin Woody, rear detachment commander for the 5-7th Air Defense Artillery, shares experiences with Capt. Chris Welch and fellow rear detachment leaders during a training session in Hanau.

Gearing up to support families

Studying case histories, setting up mock Family Assistance Centers and similar training aimed at preparing all involved

Editor's note: Last issue the *Herald Union* took a look at how 104th Area Support Group and Base Support Battalion officials are gearing up their support services to take care of families in the event of large-scale deployments of local units to the Persian Gulf region. This week the newspaper takes a closer look at how local Army Community Service managers are preparing to launch their Family Assistance Centers offering one-stop family support, a Deployment Readiness University in the 414th BSB and other creative ways of ensuring that quality support will continue undiminished when soldiers are called upon to serve their country in distant lands.

By Karl Weisel
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

"My main job is making sure families are ready and able to cope with separation," said Bridget Sanders, Baumholder deployment readiness, mobilization and outreach coordinator. "We're trying to make sure that families are self-sufficient and that they will know we're here to help."

"Our advice to families is to be patient and not jump the gun about what may happen," said Sanders. "We (the Baumholder ACS staff) are pretty much business as usual."

More than 70 rear detachment staff, Family Readiness Group leaders and family readiness liaisons converged on Hanau Army Community

Service on Pioneer Kaserne Jan. 21-22 to network with one another, share case histories and lessons learned from past deployments, and to get a better understanding of the wide range of support available.

"We made contact with all of the agencies in the area," said Richard Garcia, deployment and mobilization coordinator for Hanau ACS.

In addition to updating their "Smart book," a resource guide with points of contact, telephone numbers and information on every facet of family support, like fellow ACS leaders throughout the 104th ASG, the 414th BSB ACS managers brainstormed last year in an effort to come up with a centralized training program for family readiness and rear detachment leaders. The result was Deployment Readiness University.

'One-stop shopping'

"This is almost like one-stop shopping," said Garcia. "Rear detachment and FRG leaders can attend our Deployment Readiness University and receive all the information they may need for their units. ... People rotate in and out of units and support organizations all the time, and that was something we considered as well. This is something we will offer again in the near future."

"Talking to family members you can tell there is some concern," said Charlotte Riley, with Hanau's Army Family Team Building program. "They're hearing about units moving and they want to know. They want to be armed with knowledge."



Erika Thompson (from left), a Family Readiness Group leader with the 38th Engineer Company; Staff Sgt. Lakrisia Darby, a rear detachment leader with the 55th Personnel Services Battalion; and Sgt. 1st Class Kirk Shelby, 565th Engineer Battalion, discuss case studies during training.

"We're learning about what goes on behind the scenes with base operations, the rules and how things get done," said Sgt. 1st Class Kirk Shelby, a rear detachment leader with the 565th Engineer Battalion. "It's some things that families might run into."

Shelby, who served in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, said he appreciated the work of FRGs and rear detachment personnel — "not from this side, from the other side."

While FRG leaders said they look forward to helping wherever they can when spouses deploy, "FRGs are not a babysitting agency." The

comment came from one FRG leader during a case study session where small groups of FRG and rear detachment leaders looked at instances where leaders may have to make some very tough decisions about how to best support unit readiness and families.

"There's been a lot of information today that I didn't know before," said Erika Thompson, an FRG co-leader with the 38th Engineer Company. "My background is in accounting, but this financial information is just indispensable to bring back to the families."



Jill Colgan plays with her daughter Grace and William Knarr during a Parent and Me Playtime session at Giessen Army Community Service. Programs such as these become even more important during extended deployments, said ACS officials. Stop by your local ACS or outreach center to find out about these and the many other programs available throughout the communities of the 104th Area Support Group.

Photo by Alexandra Williams

(Editor's note: see page 16 for a closer look at family support in the 284th BSB).

The 284th BSB conducted a mock FAC Jan. 15-16 at the Giessen ACS. "Our goal during this period was to ensure that our staff as well as BSB staff elements are fully prepared to convert to a FAC and serve as the information center for the community," said Deborah Gantt, Giessen outreach, mobilization and deployment readiness program manager.

Video Teleconferencing

Pinion added that both the Friedberg and Giessen ACSs are fully prepared to provide VTC support as well during a deployment. "We used the VTC quite a bit during the Kosovo deployment," she said. "It's so important that family members talk about whatever situations or concerns they may have right away," said Edwina Brown, mobilization and deployment program manager for the 221st BSB ACS. That way they can find help readily available at their local Army Community Service and Family Advocacy Program before being separated during a deployment.

Brown explained that the 221st BSB ACS staff members were busy providing a host of training for family readiness liaisons, rear detachment and Family Readiness Group leaders. "We are ensuring that support services remain readily available. ... We want people to feel comfortable about the support."

"My advice to family members is to really connect with their Family Readiness Groups," said Brown. "They have the knowledge, the skills and the training to help. They are the key to providing an information and communication link."

For more information on ACS services during deployment call Edwina Brown in Wiesbaden at mil 337-5034, Bridget Sanders in Baumholder at mil 485-8188, Martha Pinion in Friedberg at mil 324-3710, Deborah Gantt in Giessen at mil 343-6039 or Richard Garcia in Hanau at mil 322-9523. (David Ruderman contributed to this story.)